

Now & Then in Ripon ... *Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society*

Explore the Lola Smith photograph collection

Ripon Historical Society archivist Carol Sachen and Director Caron Sisko recently processed the Lola Smith Photograph Collection, containing 52 Kodachrome slides of gardens taken by Lola Smith from 1942 to 1956 and by an unknown photographer from 1942 to 1949. The photographs have a dreamlike quality and unique aesthetic.

Who was Lola Smith? And why were the photographs taken? In the local newspapers, Lola is referred to as Mrs. Warren Smith. Lois (Lola) Newcomb (1880-1966) married Warren Smith in 1903 and they moved to Ripon when he accepted a position in



Lola Smith

1912 as professor of history at Ripon College. Lola lived at 234 Elm St. and was a Ripon resident for the next 54 years.

Following World War I, the National Better Homes movement was started to promote home ownership and good citizenship. Gardening became part of pride in homeownership and by 1931 the Ripon Garden Club was begun with Lola Smith as one of the charter members. Yard and Garden Club, Home Garden Club and

Ceresco Garden Club were established in the 1930s as well.

The slide mounts have handwritten dates, locations and sometimes the type of flower, shrub or tree. The only clue and possible reason for the slides can be found in the "Local News" section of the *Ripon Commonwealth* in 1945 and the *Ripon Weekly Press* in 1950. The two snippets mention supplementing the garden meeting programs with Mrs. Warren Smith showing slides of and around Ripon.

Ironically, Mrs. Smith was said to have a beautiful garden in her backyard, with an arbor covered in roses, but the society has no photographs of it.

Kodachrome is the brand name for color reversal film. The film stood out for its unique development process and results. It was introduced by the Eastman Kodak company in 1935. The color film has three layers of emulsion, each sensitive to one of the primary colors, red, green and blue. The film captures a range of tonal values.

Kodachrome is called "reversal film"



THIS IS A photo of Mrs. George Graf's and Ray Searl's garden border on Ransom Street in August 1943.

because it produces a positive image directly on the film, unlike negative film which creates an inverted image that must be printed. Instead of needing a separate print to get a positive image, Kodachrome's development process creates a transparent image, ready for projection.

The decline of Kodachrome began in the 1980s as digital photography started to gain in popularity. Kodachrome slides can last for a long time, potentially more than a century, if stored in a cool, dark, dry environment.

Some of the photographs are slightly out of focus, but this could be for multiple reasons: the ISO setting was too low, camera shake or deterioration of the emulsion.

The Ripon Historical Society will open the Pedrick-Lawson House, barn and Pickard House at 508 Watson St. for the Ripon Chamber of Commerce Twilight Garden Tour Saturday, July 19 from 4 to 7 p.m.

Behind the Pedrick-Lawson House is found a heritage garden containing plants that would have been found in early Ripon and Wisconsin gardens.

Also in the garden are two grave markers. One marker, sculpted by Cyrus Pedrick, was a headstone for his nephew, Charlie Pedrick (1861-1862).

The headstone was removed and replaced in 1920. Charlie died of scarlet fever at 14 months old. The marker is 2 feet tall and features a kneeling boy. The

other marker is broken and unidentified but for a birth date of 1831 and a death date sometime in the 1860s. It was found outside of the John Scott Horner house, 336 Scott St., when recent renovation started on the early 1850s house.

The society has brought the outdoors inside, featuring a garden-inspired mini exhibit in the Pickard House Museum, in celebration of the Twilight Garden Tour Saturday.

One of the items on display is a circa 1890 painting of lilies on velvet by Charlotte Kingsbury, daughter of Philo England. Also on display are an 1878 courting candle, a tulip applique quilt and linoleum prints by artist Evelyn Kain (1946-2022).

The Lola Smith Collection will be shown, in its entirety, on Ripon Historical Society's flatscreen TV the day of the Twilight Garden Tour event. For those unable to make the event, the collection is available for viewing online via the CatalogIt HUB. Just visit www.ripon-history.org and click on "Explore Our Collection."

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information, visit www.riponhistory.org, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.



LOLA SMITH CAPTURED this photo of Viola Kurth's spring garden on Watson Street in 1946

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